



Biochem Threat Preparedness

Recent ricin attacks at Senator Bill Frist's office are a chilling reminder of the anthrax attacks in 2001 and bring the threat of chemical and biological terrorism in the U.S. back into focus.

If a chemical or biological incident occurs at your site, an appropriate response can help limit the harm. That means being aware and prepared to deal with potential dangers.

Every organization should have an emergency action plan, including how to respond to suspected chemical and biological incidents. Be familiar with your plan and know what to do in an emergency.

Emergency action plans must include:

- Method for reporting emergencies
- Evacuation policy and procedures
- Emergency escape procedures and routes, workplace maps and safe refuge areas

Emergency plans should also include:

- Contact information for all employees
- Others to contact
- Shutdown procedures
- Rescue and medical duties



With chemical and biological incidents, response is aimed at limiting and avoiding exposure. This generally means evacuating the area or sheltering in place, depending on the incident.

In the case of agents delivered through the mail, such as with the ricin and anthrax attacks, containment and evacuation are the best responses.

Suspicious Packages

Equally important is a clear and effective plan for recognizing and responding to suspicious packages delivered in the mail or placed by an individual. Such packages have been used to deliver chemical and biological agents and explosive devices.

An unattended, unclaimed package is always suspicious. Other warning signs include:

- Unfamiliar source
- Missing or fictitious return address
- Wires, foil, stains or odors
- Unusual weight, size or shape
- Unusual packaging or labeling
- Addressed to incorrect titles, or titles without names
- Handwritten or poorly typed labels





Reporting and Decontamination

If you suspect the presence of a chemical or biological agent:

- Clear the area and prevent reentry
- Notify security and building management
- Contact police in accordance with post orders or emergency action plan
- Wait for further instructions from security, your supervisor or emergency personnel

After reporting a chemical or biological incident:

- Follow instructions of police or local authorities
- Keep people away from contaminated areas
- Isolate contaminated individuals from others
- In accordance with local authorities, direct those contaminated to seek medical attention
- Make a list of everyone who was in the room when the substance was discovered so health officials and authorities can follow up

If you believe there may have been exposure to biochem agents, decontaminate immediately to minimize health risks:

- Remove all clothing and personal items contacting the body
- Cut clothing off to avoid pulling over head
- Put clothing in sealed bag
- Remove glasses or contacts after washing hands thoroughly with soap
- Decontaminate glasses in bleach
- Flush eyes with lots of water
- Gently wash face and hair with soap and water, then rinse
- Wash other body areas that may have been contaminated

- Wash by gently blotting with a cloth and soapy water. Do not scrub or scrape — this can force the substance into the skin
- Put on uncontaminated clothing

Evacuation Plan

Disorganized evacuation can be confusing and dangerous. To avoid injury and property damage, evacuation plans should address:

- Circumstances requiring evacuation
- Who is authorized to order evacuation
- Procedures for assisting people with disabilities or special needs
- Designation of any shutdown or other special responsibilities
- A way to account for personnel after evacuation
- Specific evacuation procedures, including routes and exits, clearly posted for all employees

Evacuation routes and exits should:

- Designate primary and secondary evacuation routes and exits
- Use all available emergency exits to evacuate quickly and minimize overcrowding at a single exit
- Be wide enough to accommodate the number of evacuating personnel
- Be clearly marked and well lit
- Be unobstructed and clear of debris at all times
- Not allow the use of elevators
- Keep people to the right going down stairs so emergency workers can come up
- Not expose evacuating personnel to additional hazards

Emergency response is a specialized job for trained professionals. Talk to your security supervisor about your emergency action plan, and be prepared. The more you know about how to respond in emergencies, the safer you'll be.

For more information, check out these resources:
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/> ; <http://www.ready.gov/>
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/>
<http://www.redcross.org/>

